

*Ancient Greek
Literature*

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To
RICHARD JENNINGS

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	9
I HOMER AND HESIOD	19
II EARLY ELEGIAC AND LYRIC POETRY.	48
III ATTIC TRAGEDY	76
IV THE DEVELOPMENT OF HISTORY	121
V OLD AND NEW COMEDY	150
VI PLATO AND ARISTOTLE	168
VII THE ORATORS	193
VIII ALEXANDRIA AND AFTER	217
CONCLUSION	243
BIBLIOGRAPHY	251
INDEX	253



INTRODUCTION

AMONG European literatures that of ancient Greece has a peculiar place. It is the earliest of which anything has survived, and it has had the widest influence on posterity. The standards, forms, and methods of the Greeks affected the nascent literature of Rome and through Rome the whole culture of the modern world. Even if Greek had no intrinsic or permanent value of its own, it would still be of incalculable importance. But its interest is not primarily historical. Greek literature commands attention because of its intrinsic value, because the Greeks invented and perfected certain types of literary art and produced masterpieces which still excite wonder and delight despite the lapse of generations and vast changes in human outlook. In epic, lyric, and dramatic poetry, in historical, philosophical, and rhetorical prose, the Greeks achieved results so satisfactory in form and so compelling in content that their work has often been held up as a type of perfection and followed as the pattern of what all such work should be.

And yet of this literature, so influential and attractive, we possess only fragments, a mere tithe of what once existed. We have